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Modern Hebrew Literature

(With a Preface by the Haham Dr. Gaster).

A PAPER

Read before the Annual Conference, in London, of the International Society of Philology, Science and Fine Arts

BY

I. WASSILEVSKY

ON

JUNE 25TH, 1915.

PRICE FOUR PENCE.

LONDON

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PREFACE.

I willingly accede to the pressing request of Mr. Wassilevsky to write a brief prefactory note to his essay on Modern Hebrew Literature. Truth to tell there is no necessity for such an introductory note. The essay is sure to recommend itself to thoughtful readers by its own intrinsic merit.

And yet a few words on the subject matter and on the manner in which Mr. Wassilevsky has handled it may perhaps not be out of place, if only as an expression of my own opinion. To start with the last: I have been greatly impressed by the ability with which Mr. Wassilevsky has been able to survey so complicated a movement and to compress it within the narrow frame of a short essay. The impartiality and sound judgment displayed in adjudicating the merits of the numerous authors, the acumen with which he delineates the leading features and the characteristic traits of these writers mark out this essay as being not only a sketch but also a critical guide to those who would like to get into close touch with these men and their work. One need not necessarily agree with each of the conclusions of Mr. Wassilevsky, and we seldom agree with other men's conclusions if they happen to run counter to our own. But such is human weakness, and curiously enough it is strongly displayed in the judgment passed by one Hebrew writer upon the works of another, especially if he happen to be his contemporary. We are always much too critical with our own and singularly lenient with the outsider.

The psychological problems connected with this literature are very numerous. It would be going beyond the limits of a mere introduction were I to venture even upon however brief an investigation. A few words must suffice. For the careful reader of Mr. Wassilevsky's essay will be able to discern at least some of them. One is forcibly reminded of the witty saying of our sages which explains the blessing of Noah as meaning that the beauty of Japhet should dwell in the tents of Shem; that all that was most

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beautiful in the spiritual life and in the artistic production of the children of Japhet should also become the property of the children of Shem. This has practically been the process of a long continued assimilation and modification so characteristic of certain epochs of transition. The Greek and the Arabic period have left their traces in Jewish literature. In a similar manner a modern spirit has made inroads into the domain of the Jewish literature ever since they came into close contact with one another. The model was set by the gentile. The Jew endeavoured to imitate and to assimilate and then rose slowly to independent work. This is also, in a way, the history of every modern literature. It starts in many cases with a translation of the Bible; then follow translations and adaptations of foreign examples of classical writings until the writers emancipate themselves, and following the bent of their own genius give expression to national ideals and national hopes. Modern Hebrew literature is taking the same course of development. It is most interesting and fascinating to follow up the breaches, originally very small, made in the walls of the ghetto, through which the light of the spirit from without began to pour in, and the avidity with which the Jews turned to these new rays of light which they believed to be a new source of poetical inspiration. One has only to remember Wesseley with his imitations of Klopstock, substituting Moses for the hero of the latter's epos, and then the various beginnings in drama and in poetry, not to speak of Luzzatto's older imitation and adaptation of the Pasto Fido until we reach the more recent writers like Shulman and Mappo down to Bialik. We obtain a better insight into this period of *sturm und drang* if we compare the beginnings of this Hebrew literature with the mighty movement of the spirit without, and see how the Jews tried at one jump to scale the Olympus, and then, by a further development, attempted their emancipation and partly succeeded. But the Jews had to overcome not only difficulty of assimilating new ideas and of adjusting their vision to the wider horizon that opened before them; they had to cope with the difficulty of the language. Hebrew is not a living language in the sense in which the word is usually understood. It is a living language inasmuch as its use has not ceased. But it has to be acquired from the Book. It is not a language of free parlance. It is not the vernacular as yet of any country. The language represents a different phase of spiritual life, yet it is malleable, it is plastic. In the hands of the true

poet it can be used with great effect. But then that poet must be the exponent of the Jewish spirit. Not everything written in the Hebrew language is by itself as yet Jewish. It must be also Jewish in spirit, Jewish in conception, Jewish in style as well as in syntax, in the symmetry and poise of the phrase. Here also we can see steady development and growth. I am not here to criticise, for I may perhaps disagree with the liberties which modern writers have taken with the Hebrew language—in the coining of new words and in the syntactical construction of the phrase. But these, however, are infantile illnesses inherent in every new movement which ignores the past. Because new ideas are welling up from the source of new inspiration a new vocabulary has to be created to give outward form to what the mind has fashioned. Instead of delving deep into the mines and treasures of the past and drawing to the light the ore found therein our new writers, who believed that the past had no further message for them, turned away from the only source of true inspiration and true language. It is like unto the period of fermentation, when new wine is poured into old casks. But the time is approaching when the lees are settling at the bottom and the pure wine of the Jewish spirit will be decanted in the Jewish banqueting-halls, a feast of the spirit, a joy for the heart and mind of a revived Jewish nation. Mr. Wassilevsky's essay will show the reader how this movement has proceeded and how from small beginnings, step by step, a new literature is being evolved under our very eyes.

M. GASTER.

On the Memorial Day of Mappo.

Modern Hebrew Literature.

THERE is no nation which so often forms the subject of discussion as the Jewish nation, and there is barely anyone who will hesitate to express an opinion, good or evil, about the Jew. Pedants and learned divines deduce their conclusions from the Bible—a book written thousands of years ago—or from some aphorisms culled from the Talmud by people who were alien to the spirit of that book, while the average man forms his ideas about the Jew from accepted standards of his environment, or from his own commercial relations with him. If the Jew with whom he has come in contact happens to be an honest and straightforward man he arrives at the conclusion that all Jews are honest and straightforward; but if it happens that he has been victimised or duped by a Jew then all Jews are put down as swindlers and knaves. We are, therefore, not surprised to find in the world's literature Jews of every imaginable type, a Shylock or Shylock's daughter, an old-clothes dealer, a deformed creature, or the Jew who is but a Jew in name; but rarely do we find the true Jew with the Jewish spirit, or the Jew as he is in all his essentials and ideals. The Jew of to-day is no longer the Jew of the Bible, even as the modern Englishman is unlike the Englishman of the Shakespearian period. It would be wrong to form an opinion of the English nation, or of any other nation from a commercial standpoint only, and it would be even more unjustifiable to judge the Jew from a commercial view alone. I say advisedly "even more," with regard to the Jewish nation, because, while other nations can choose the courses into which the ramifications of their commerce will extend, the members of the Jewish nation have no such choice. They are compelled to enter such trades as the laws and customs of the countries, in which chance or misfortune may have placed them, choose to leave open to them. Sometimes, as in Russia the Jew enters a trade in defiance of Government laws, but this is only because he has no other means of earning a living. But quite apart from these considerations it must be obvious that commerce, whatever its character or dimensions, is scarcely a suitable standard by which to judge the intellectual or moral plane of a nation, since even in its highest development it does not express a people's soul. The soul of a nation is reflected in its literature, which comprehends the spiritual and material elements of its life in every age, and which gathers in the thoughts and emotions produced in the mind and the heart of the people of which it is the written expression. The soul of the Jewish nation in modern times can only be appreciated by familiarity with its present-day literature which is, unfortunately, for the most part a sealed book to the whole world. And how strange and sad it is that while many people will utter judgment, for the most part unfavourable, about the Jew, very few indeed will trouble to learn the Hebrew language so as not only to understand the Jew of bygone ages, and to discover his relationship to the theology of the New Testament but also in such a manner as to read also the literature of later, times in which is reflected

who still lives and creates even to-day new thoughts and new ideals. There are those who think that Hebrew literature ends with the Bible or with the Talmud. Need I say that it is not so? The Jewish nation has continued its literary activity in all ages and all lands, even the lands of exile. There is no doubt that its force of life was weakened and interrupted during the long course of its wanderings, but it has continually expressed its personality in many shapes and forms through the Hebrew language. The Hebrew genius has also built up its literature in the Aramaic, Greek, Arabic, Spanish, Italian, French, German, Russian, English and other languages, but the true Hebrew soul has only spoken in its own language. At no time was there a period when the nation did not express its spirit in some work of literary merit, and the best works written by Jews in other languages in which the Jew has discovered his spirit have almost immediately been translated into the Hebrew language. We can only say that the history of the Hebrew nation can be found in her literature, but this literature was always, with very few exceptions, religious and mystical. The circumstances of the Jew since he left his country have not allowed him to live what may be termed his true life. The present was so terrible that he always tried to remove its horrors by looking to the past or the future for consolation. The cultural threads woven from a free, natural life were altogether snapped. In the Bible the Jew found his native land, his ideal life, and his whole world. Robbed of all earthly delights, the Jew sought his whole expression in literature. Every word, every letter, and even the points in the Bible assumed a sacred form in his eyes. He seemed to live no longer on this world, but to have reached the portals of heaven, and he interpreted all knowledge, scientific, political and social, in terms of the Bible, so that Hebrew literature became a mere compendium of commentaries on the Holy Book. To take one instance of what I mean: if in those times anyone desired to say that even the every-day talk of the wise was worthy of attention, he would not support his statement by any rational argument, but putting the statement in the form of a question would ask, "How do we know that the everyday conversation of a wise man is worthy of attention?" the answer being that it is stated in Psalm i., verse 3, that he "who doth meditate day and night in the law of the Lord shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." From this we learn that the merest word, even like the leaf of this tree, shall never be lost to the world. Again, if a certain mystic wished to convey the idea that God can only be seen through nature, he took Psalm lxxxiv., verse 12, which states, "The Lord God is a sun and a shield," and continued "Just as one cannot view the sun without some protection, so one cannot see God except through 'Elohim,'" which, by an ingenious mathematical process, is proved to mean nature. Obviously a literature produced in such circumstances will not be perfect and free from defects. There is much dross, despite the numerous lofty ideals expressed therein, and despite much subtle thought there is a good deal of cloudiness and obscurity. Its greatest defect was that it enclosed itself in a narrow national and religious frame. The external conditions oppressed and choked him over much, so that the Jew,

The only True Christian

among the Christian nations, patient and forgiving to his worst enemies, could not nevertheless suppress his human instincts, and looked upon the external if

not with hate, at least with disdain and indifference. The Jew forgot that in addition to being a Jew he was also a man, and the man in him was rendered subordinate to the Jew. This world was ignored, and in his writings, apart from a few elegies and prayers here and there, there is almost no mention of the sufferings he has undergone. The soul, whose whole object was the study of the law, became everything, the body of no account; it was something of which, if not the death, at least the mortification became an important principle. We do, indeed, hear now and then voices, if faintly, even in this literature on the side of life and in opposition to those who subject the Jew, on the one hand, to dead letters and aimless scholasticism, and on the other hand, to doctrines clouded with mystery and phantasy. But these protests, like all protests against constituted authority, were soon suppressed or ignored, and the Rabbis and mystics combined, despite their own differences, to silence any voice raised against their defects. But life cannot be wholly suppressed, and the seed sown by those who fought for liberty of expression took root, and from the eighteenth century, in which Europe assumed a new form, Hebrew literature also began to assume a new direction with new aspirations. It set out at first with a stern struggle against the petrified life of the Hebrew nation, against accepted views and thoughts which had no basis in life. It attempted to introduce the streams of a general culture into the tents of Israel and to bring back the world into the life of the Jew. But although it attacked severely the exaggerated spiritualism of our people, it could not free itself from it, even in the new Humanism which it set in being, and of which it was at once the cause and the expression. Even the humanistic movement floated in the air—an ethereal daughter of heaven. With the advent of the French Revolution and its gospel of human rights, the opposition to the Jew was thought to consist merely in an opposition to his religion; hence religious reforms were instituted throughout the old religion in spite of the good it contained to make way for the new in spite of the many evils it contained, seeing in this change a means to the attainment of civil rights. The majority of the earlier works of the new literature possess some value from the point of view of history, and of the development of the Hebrew language, but they have very little literary merit. Its lyrical poetry is engaged with trivial matters; eternal questions and individual problems do not fall within its purview. It is occupied mainly with rationalism with a desire to subdue the emotions by intellect and to spread enlightenment among the masses. Nevertheless, there are some writers, if only a few, who have left behind them valuable literary productions, prominent among whom are Krochmal, Luzzatto, Mapou and Gordon. Nachman Krochmal (born Galicia 1785-1840) made the first attempt in his book "The Guide of the Perplexed in Modern Times," to bring Judaism into line with general culture, just as Maimonides attempted to do in the Spanish epoch. His theory, in short, is that every nation produces in the course of time a certain spiritual store which was called the "Spirit of the Nation," which influences all the phases of its life. No nation is entirely lost or destroyed unless this spirit fails it. This national spirit is what is called in the Bible the "God of the Nation," or in the Talmud the "Guardian Angel of the Nation." The Bible and Talmud, in other words, personified the nation's spirit. The phrase

"*A Nation and its God*"

is a common Biblical expression. Every nation has three stages like any animate object—origin, growth, and decay. With our nation, too, these three stages

have occurred more than once. In Babylon, for instance, when the nation complained to Ezekiel, "Our bones are dry, and our hope is lost," and asked "can these dry bones live"; the prophet answered "I shall place my spirit among you, and ye shall live, and I shall put you on your land"; that is to say, the exile of that time had the spiritual power to realise its great will to be a nation once more. To those who wished to assimilate among the other nations, the prophet answered and said "That which enters in your minds it will not come to pass that ye say we shall be like all the other nations." Instead of the divine worship and political law which united the people when they dwelt on their land, there was created in Babylon a new and powerful spirituality, so that they gathered together and transmitted all that was left over to them of their sacred writings, and spread them among their people. The return to Palestine commenced with very small beginnings, but in a short time there arose in Jerusalem a never-failing spring of all that was holy and spiritual. That is what may be termed a concentration of the spirit, the prevailing of some spiritual interest in the depths of a nation's soul over all its other interests, until the nation becomes subjected to this spiritual element. All the other nations existed by virtue of their particular spiritual powers. One nation took might for its God, another beauty, and so forth. Now these nations did not perceive that the truth and existence of their spiritual element did not depend on the questions of time and place. From this point of view it was liable to destruction and decay, being limited and special to the individual nation. Therefore, when the nation was destroyed, there was destroyed with it its culture which depended entirely on temporal and spatial considerations. Not so was the portion of Jacob. Israel's spiritual element on the other hand was more universalistic, embracing all spiritual essences and creating all things; therefore its existence does not depend on time and place. The spiritual essence which rules over all the nations is its God, and this is the essence of the existence of the Hebrew nation and its eternal function. Samuel David Luzzatto (Italy, 1800-1865), who was a poet and a deep student of Hebrew grammar and prosody, conceived Judaism as an emotion and introduced religious romanticism into our literature. He was the spiritual heir of Jehudah Halevi and partly a disciple of Rousseau. He opposed the Jewish scholars who wished to reconcile religion and science and to examine the foundations of eternal truth contained in the law of Moses. Foreshadowing the modern pragmatic theory, he held that religion is to be accepted whether true or not, provided that it is useful, and that it is unnecessary that all the words of the Mosaic law shall be true, for their purpose is only the attainment of good conduct and moral life. It may be asked did not the Greeks also have a system of morality? Aristotle also wrote on ethics? What then is the difference between Hebrew and Greek morality? Luzzatto answers that the teaching of Abraham is not the golden mean which Aristotle taught. Aristotle's system is an intellectual and logical method with the object of improving our personal welfare and obtaining recognition from our fellow men; Abraham's teaching is one of love and mercy, and its object is the welfare of others and recognition from God. Judaism and Hellenism are not merely two intellectual systems but

Two Great Forces

operating at once in man's soul. Greek culture which is philosophy, science, fine arts, and intellectual morality, can progress and expand, for we can make discoveries every day, but Judaism, which is the love of the good and the upright,

stands where it is—the studies arising from it can never alter. Man's heart is liable to corruption but not to improvement, for the nature of man is good, whereas he acquires evil in the conduct of life. Judaism can throw off many conceptions which it has received and return to its original principles, but it cannot progress in its ultimate essence. Human nature is opposed to the domination of the intellect and prefers the love of the good and upright, which is the spirit of Judaism. Should, however, Greek science fall and be conquered by Judaism, then also there will arise an internal conflict in the soul of mankind, for the development of the intellect and the love of beauty are also part of its life. Civilisation, therefore, never progresses but only changes from time to time. At times the tendency to morality and faith prevails, at others the tendency towards art and beauty. Luzzatto was not an enemy to Greek culture. He admits its virtues, and loved art and beauty and natural science, which are the features of Greek culture, against which are to be found among Jews a lack of order and classification and a habit to ascribe all things to first causes. Still, he desires Jewish people to prefer the divine part which is the spirit of Judaism, to the human part which has entered it from without. After all, the true basis of morality is not the ideal of the Greek—personal enjoyment—but that of the Jew—the welfare of others. According to him, most of the principles propounded by the Greek philosophers are at bottom false or are useful only to philosophers, but not to the mass of the people, and that is why the Christian religion—the daughter of the Jewish religion—prevailed over Greek philosophy. These two writers, Krochmal and Luzzatto, infused new life into the artificial rhetorical style then in vogue in the Hebrew literature. Important writers and poets as Rapaport, Erter, Letteris, and a host of others, were instrumental in spreading Hebrew literature among Jews of all lands, particularly in Russia, the home of the greater portion of the Jewish nation. There Hebrew literature found more or less the environment necessary for its progress, and there it found the most advanced spiritual forces which for many generations it had lacked. Hebrew literature was enriched in the course of time by many productions, particularly in the sphere of poetry, creations which, indeed, may find a worthy place among the classical productions of Europe. One of the early founders of Hebrew literature, in which the Jewish nation as well as the whole world may take pride, was Abraham Mapou (Russia 1808-1866), the creator of the Hebrew novel. With him commences the real birth of the modern Hebrew literature. Before Mapou came Hebrew literature was the plaything of scholars and thinkers and pedants, whose sole aim was religious philosophising and the reconciling of science and religion and poems devoid of thought and imagination. Isaac Bar Levinson, Adam Hacohen Lebhensen, Mordecai Aaron Ginsburg, Calman Shulman, were not superior in profundity of thought, despite the great part they played in the development of our literature, to the pioneers of Hebrew literature in other countries. Originality was not a common characteristic of their work. They have bequeathed works but not creations. Michah Joseph Levinson, who exhibited

The Poetic Talent

in the highest degree, unfortunately died in early youth. Hebrew literature lacked a department of light romantic reading; the novel, the great universal provider which transplants man into new worlds and places into him new thoughts and new inspirations, was unknown. Jewish life was too drab and bleak. Eugène Sue's "Mysteries of Paris," translated by Shulman, the first novel acces-

sible to the Hebrew reader, was, in spite of its great influence, strange to the Hebrew mind. Mapou was not only the first man to supply this want, but with his novel, "The Love of Zion," he accomplished, if unconsciously, a new national achievement. This book is a historical novel founded on chapters of Israelitish life in the times of Isaiah. The plot is modern, copied in method from French novels, which were not of the best; it contains no high ideals nor special problems, but it is redolent of early Hebrew life, and its very faults and deficiencies from the point of technique are in fact its qualities. The exaggerated psychological investigations indulged in by modern novelists rob their creations of any historical accuracy. All Mapou's characters, from the prince to the beggar-maid, speak the language of their station. The love he portrays is Israelitish and healthy, pure and holy, without any of the coarse sensuality which we find so often in the historical novels of other literatures. The description of the capital, Jerusalem, is blurred and weak; after all, imagination must have a basis for its creations, and Mapou lacked such a foundation, for he had no first-hand knowledge of city life. On the other hand his descriptions of Hebrew rustic life are real works of genius. The novel, "The Guilt of Samaria," which is twice the size of "The Love of Zion," is of less literary value, but it also contains many beautiful and vivid scenes. Mapou's great fault is that though he knows the depths of the Jews of the southern kingdom, he is unable, Rabbinical student that he was, to appreciate the spirit of the Jews of the Northern Kingdom. The Jews of Judah are the depository of all that is good and righteous, and the Jews of Ephraim all that is false and vile. After all the false prophet of Israel was not always a deceiver and enemy to his people, but Mapou was unable to appreciate the divine which shines forth even from sin, and he could not discern the unity existing between the children of Ephraim and Judah in their very differences. The result was that he divided the Hebrew nation into two. In his third book, "The Hypocrite," a novel written in five parts, he attempted to describe the life of his fellow Jews in Russia, without success, for his thoughts were more absorbed in the early life of the Hebrew nation than that of his own time. It may be said that though he was not the prophet of his times, he was, nevertheless, the greatest poet and singer of the Hebrew language and the Jewish land. Before Mapou wrote "The Love of Zion" and "The Guilt of Samaria," Palestine, in the mind of the Jewish people, was not a spot on the earth but a place in heaven, and not only its prophets but even its kings and warriors seemed to be ethereal beings whose sole object was to enjoy the glory of God. The very battles of Jewish history were, in their thoughts, fought by angels. He was the first to put an end to this

Mystic Illusion

and gave them back the land in a concrete form. He described for them its inhabitants in the form of living men, made up of souls and bodies. His works aroused a feeling of beauty in the Jew and awakened in him a taste for Hebrew poetry and a desire for a natural and healthy Hebrew life. His heroes were popular characters among the Jews, an achievement which greater writers than he were unable to accomplish. The "Love of Zion," an astonishing vision calling forth our admiration at its pictures and prophetic style, is justly accounted to-day as the first classic novel which the Jewish nation created in the Diaspora. Among the prose writers who appeared after him, Smolensky (Russia 1842-1885) is considered the best. He was a modern writer, and in spite of sporadic traces of a fine romanticism, is a realist absorbed in the needs of his time in describing every

phase of Jewish life in Russia and in neighbouring countries. In his work entitled "The Wanderer Astray on the Path of Life," the hero of which—Joseph—is a sort of David Copperfield, he passes before us a panorama of isolated, realistic pictures. A highly coloured gallery of scenes from Ghetto life, a faithful portraiture of everyday incidents are found therein. In the same way is actual life depicted in the rest of his longer and shorter stories. Nevertheless, he is more an idealistic writer, walking ahead of his generation, seeing what is in the distance, rather than what is near him. His power of preaching is greater than that of description. His heroes continually battle for causes sacred to him rather than for causes sacred to them, but his stories possess this superiority over those of Mapou, in the fact that the latter understood the essential nature of the Jewish nation in the absolute unity of the nation, the language, and the land, only as a poet, whereas Smolensky grasped it by his personal national consciousness. It was this national consciousness which told him that the Jews were not a religious brotherhood, but a nation, and that the decline of the nation was not the fault of the religion, but the fault of the Golus. He held that the dust and the dross which clung to the religion were not the fault of the nation, but the result of the Golus, and that the redemption of them both could not arise by any so-called emancipation or religious reforms, but by the reform of Jewish life itself, which would necessitate a return to the land of our Fathers. He is, perhaps, the only writer who knew how to harmonise in his tales the man and the Jew, while other writers, including even those of our own time, limit themselves for the most part, either to the Jew or to the man, or deal with the conflicts between them without the power to achieve a reconciliation. His journal "The Dawn," in which he sank all his earnings from other activities and which brought on his death at the early age of 43, was instrumental in creating a whole generation of important writers, such as Judah Leib Levine, who combined Judaism with Socialism, and Dolitzky, the poet of national Romanticism. His influence on Hebrew literature is felt even to-day, and with him Hebrew literature, from being the representative of the few, became representative of the whole Jewish nation. Gordon (Russia 1832-1890), the greatest poet of his age, was a regular contributor to Smolensky's paper, "The Dawn," though he was a representative of the old school of humanism. He wrote a few poems such as "David and Michael," "Osna, daughter of Potipharaoh," "Between the Jaws of the Lion," and "In the Depths of the Sea," in which he attained true poetic height. His style is always rich, but his setting is generally narrow. Educated for the most part in Rabbinic literature, of which intellect is

The Dominating Influence,

he was totally strange to the mystic literature. From European literature he gained his general culture and his powers of analysis, but he could not appreciate the beauties of nature and the depths of man's emotions. He was occupied mostly in finding fault with Rabbinic literature, which he believed to have been largely responsible for the downfall of the Jewish nation. He could not realise the beauty which lay in the inner depths of Rabbinic literature and the doctrines of life contained in the theme of death. In his poetry we feel the beauty of the Hebrew language, but not the greatness and height of Hebrew thought. A wonderful book, in style and content, emanating from that period is the book called "The Sins of Youth," which describes the life of the author, Moses Leib Lillienbloom (Russia 1843-1910), a mixture of Rousseau and Voltaire. This work is a book of confessions parallel in Hebrew literature with the con

fessions of Rousseau in French literature. In it we hear the mystic weepings of the religious soul—a soul yearning for God, and despite the scepticism it contains we find therein wandering and questioning faith. In it we find described the strenuous conflict between the man and the Jew, which the author is unable to reconcile. The second part appeared after the lapse of a few years. As a result of the pogroms which befell our people in Russia, the national ideal prevailed over the general humanitarian ideal. Now the patriot prevailed over the author who regards literature only as a handmaiden to life, and through this his literary talent was weakened. Lillienbloom was in his own person the hero of the Ghetto drama. It is a thousand pities that no writer of genius has arisen to make use of his wonderful personality as the hero of a literary creation. One writer, indeed, Asher Reuben Braudes made Lillienbloom the central figure of his novel, "Religion and Life," but Lillienbloom's personality was too great and elusive for the inferior talents of this author. If Mapou was the Hebrew prophet, Smolensky, the polemical author, and Lillienbloom, the literary agitator, Salom Jacob Abrahamovitch, better known an Mendele Mocher Sephorim, a man of eighty who is still with us, is the literary artist of this period. He portrays the light that is to be found in darkness, the pure in the sordid, the sun in the cloud, the beautiful in the ugly, with an artistic power not easily equalled. He still is with us, a man of unceasing activity. His first realistic story called "Fathers and Children," written under the influence of Turgenief, appeared half a century ago, and, as it name signifies, it describes the conflict between the believing fathers and the children who have left the path. Its literary value was infinitesimal, but in the course of time he has enriched Hebrew literature with wonderful classic productions which could adorn the richest literature in the world. He is no imitator, but is original from beginning to end—both in style and in his art of story-telling. The mere story is not the chief point with him, but the description of the types he created which reflect the general character of the nation. He has written many books, and every book is a veritable prose poem. He has no concern with ideals or causes, and no central ideal is revealed in his stories, but he passes before us

The whole life of the Golus

of the preceding generation in all its depth of sorrow and joy. In one of his tales the Hebrew nation is portrayed under the form of an ill-treated nag, demanding a right to live equally with other animals. This tale is the bitterest cry of agony heard since the writing of Lamentations. His work "Benjamin the Third," describing the Hebrew Don Quixote, is only an imitation in its outer dress; in its inner spirit there is not a vestige of imitation. It is original in its speech and in its talk, in its dreams and aspirations, in its works and its deeds. Such is Sandol, his Sanchopanza, and such is the Princess; not an ordinary maiden but symbolic of the Jewish nation. Mendele Mocher Sephorim is known in our literature under the name of the Grandfather. Thank God the Grandfather need feel no shame for his grandchildren. Among them are writers who surpass their grandfather, if not in their artistic talents, at least in their creative powers. But before speaking about these grandchildren through whom Hebrew literature has become European in the full sense of the word, I must mention two modern writers, who though their activities extend into our own times, really belong to the preceding generation. They are David Frischman and Jehudah Leib Perez, through whose work our literature has become what it is. David Frischman is the creator of the Hebrew Feuilleton. He also holds a place in our literature as a poet, prose

writer, critic and translator. Among his numerous translations are Byron's "Cain," George Eliot's "Daniel Deronda," and Nietzsche's "Thus Spake Zarathustra." This writer entered the field of Hebrew literature amidst the flare of trumpets in a successful endeavour to destroy the empty bombast, the poetic inutility, the artificial pathos which then reigned supreme. Before the advent of Frischman, Hebrew writers dressed their words in flowery rhetorical garb, making use of biblical reminiscences and spoiling their thoughts by the artificiality of their language. He was the first writer to demonstrate that it was possible to express, also in Hebrew, any thought or idea pithily, and concisely, and that literature is a spiritual possession, universal or national, of an individualistic importance; that it was not a mere vehicle of life, but life itself. His feuilleton is an artistic creation, clever talk containing raillery, sarcastic quips and rebukes in combination, judging all the facts of life with soul and emotion. In his poetry and short stories we find portrayed the poetry of human life and the character of the feeling soul, the sun of spring, the majesty of nature, the glory of life and the turbulence of the soul. He also wrote many legendary tales which are in themselves a world of poetry. He has a path all to himself. In one of his poems he says, "My path is narrow, though far-reaching, and alone I traverse it. Alone am I accompanied by God, the God who burns in my heart." This is, indeed, a faithful description of Frischman, for he walks solitary and alone on his literary paths. Izaac Leib Perez (Russia, 1851-1915), who died only a few months ago, began his activities a few years before Frischman. He began as a realist and ended up a symbolist. His stories are very short, but they are numerous and do not serve any one purpose or any one ideal. What strikes him for the moment is described and portrayed. With him, as with Mendele, the individual is the limit of his treatment, the nation is reflected in the character of the individual but whereas Mendele deals mainly with

The Material Life,

and touches the life of the spirit only by the way, Perez deals principally with the spiritual and abstract life of his heroes. Every type he creates bears the stamp of Hebrew culture. With his deep perception he enters into the depths of the human heart and finds a heart and soul even in the outcasts and pariahs of human society. He is particularly great when he transcends the limited life of ordinary experience. In his tales of Chassidic life he sounds the poetic depths of Judaism and rises therein to the height of a true poet of genius. He sings of love and life, of nature and beauty, and in all that left his pen there is distinctive Hebrew originality. The difference between Frischman and Perez is great, despite their lyrical affinities. Their common feature is that they considered Judaism to be an abstract idea, and instead of contemplating the Hebrew nation as settled in the land of its fathers, they wished all nations to live by virtue of their spirit desiring to reproduce the world over, the phenomenon of the Jewish nation, which possesses its land only in an idea. Nevertheless, their work was valuable, if unconsciously, for a national revival since they introduced their readers into the stores of tradition, faith, and folk lore, which made an appeal by their glamour and beauty. Together with Brainin, the great biographer, Sokolow, the journalist, poet and essayist, Dr. Berenfeld, the historian and philosopher, and a host of others, they brought out our literature from its narrow and limited sphere and made it comprehensive of all the phenomena of life, and the departments of science, an achievement which we must acclaim to be wonderful and glorious. To-day we possess novelists, authors, critics, journalists, historians, and transla-

tors of the first water. Particularly is Hebrew literature rich in the sphere of poetry with writers equalling the most important works of European literature.

Before dealing with the very latest Hebrew poetry I must call attention to two schools of thought dominating our literature at present, one headed by "Achad-Ha'am," the other by Dr. Berditchevsky, each of whom possesses numerous and eminent disciples. "Achad-Ha'am" is neither a philosopher nor a student of history, but a publicist of the first degree, interspersing his remarks with speculative views ; but withal he is the philosophical guide of present-day Judaism. His fixity of opinion and firmness of tone compel one to listen. His theory is expressed in a few articles of great literary value, of which the four volumes that form the whole book, " On the Parting of the Ways," in which these articles are to be found are nothing more than an amplification. All that he has written is expressed in a sound original style. His system, known by the name of "Spiritual Zionism," is with few modifications essentially the system of Nahaman Krochmel mentioned above. For the latter Judaism as a religion is only a historical and cultured attempt to reach the absolute spirituality which is the soul of the nation, or otherwise the God of the nation. "Achad-Ha'am " calls this absolute spirituality which Krochmal does not define "Hebath-Ziyon," which is the concentration of the nation's spirit in the love for Zion in such a way that, as a dominating and governing idea, it moulds and shapes the whole thought of the Jew. According to "Achad-Ha'am," what we lack most of all is a fixed national and spiritual centre, which shall constitute a safe refuge, not so much for Jews as for Judaism. This idea of the love for Zion is neither a part of Judaism nor an addition to Judaism in its essence and completeness, but Judaism itself. It is no attempt to upset or define tradition, but has as its whole object the establishment of a centre for every living aspiration, for the revival and

Free Development of the Hebrew Nation

according to its spirit on general universal principles, and to emancipate the heart of the people and bring it in relation with the whole of life without obliterating its Hebrew form. According to him Judaism is not limited to the Jewish religion, but includes all national creations. He is neither for religion nor against it, but believes that when the love for Zion will invigorate the Jewish heart and prepare it for general development, there will result, in the process of time, a living movement and development also in matters of religion. For him the nation constitutes central thought, and all our individual acts must be directed towards this point. Morality is national and must remain national, consisting of the essence of the spiritual life of each nation. Judaism does not renounce the past, nor will it be founded entirely on new principles, but will erect a new edifice on the basis of the past by the process of natural development. Following the view of Matthew Arnold, that the central idea of Hebrew prophecy is the coming of justice over the whole creation, "Achad Ha'am" holds that the mission of Israel is not the discovery of a new speculative truth, but a conciliation of practical life with absolute justice. Since absolute justice cannot be realised in practical life, for men would then be angels and not mortals, the Hebrew nation must continue to exist as the exponent and personification of this unattainable ideal. It is noteworthy that he opposed Herzl's attempt to establish an actual practical centre which was obviously different from his own idea of a spiritual centre. For Dr. Berditchevsky, on the other hand, the individual is the main thing and not the community. The community is only the material and spiritual sum total of individuals. With him, as with Schopenhauer, the will is everything, and just as the individual will to live is the uniting bond of all

our deeds, aspirations, and movements, so the general will is that which constitutes and perpetuates the community. The will of the individual is the individual's God, and the will of the nation is the national God. The individual man is unconsciously the ultimate goal and end of the universe, and the general will to exist as a nation is the means by which this end is realised. The will of the individual, the will of the nation, and the will of the universe constitute the chain of the evolution of humanity, and to emphasise any special link of this chain, as "Achad Ha'am" desires is to weaken the effect of will in general. For after all the individual is the ultimate unit of all development, containing in himself both the will of the universe and of the nation. For "Achad Ha'am" the positive comes first and the negative comes as a consequence, for Berditchevsky the negative precedes, and the positive arises when the old has been found impracticable. Negation is a great principle in life, not so much negation as doubt. Enquiry is the origin of creation, whereas certainty is a sign of finality of thought. "Achad Ha'am" wants Judaism first, and asserts that the Jews will follow, whereas to Berditchevsky the Jews as distinct from opposed to Judaism are of the first concern. He does not believe in an abstract Judaism which orders its members to act and feel in a prescribed manner, but believes in Jews moulding their Judaism at will, for at bottom he does not believe in Judaism and non-Judaism, in universalism and particularism, but in men and Jews who are men and Hebrews, at the same time living lives of beauty, purity and holiness. In philosophy and poetry there is no creation out of nothing, there is only that which we see and feel to be alive and working, and since the Hebrew genius is banished in exile we are lacking this necessary practical element. We lack

A Local for our Soul,

we lack the feeling of close proximity to the earth. Israel's redemption will, however, not come through prophets or diplomatists, but through living active men, working for themselves. We must bring the individual into the compass of the community, so that all the individual does for himself and for his household shall incidentally accrue for the benefit of the community. With reference to religion he exposes many of its sores and ills, but he is not opposed to religion itself. For him not justice but holiness is the aim "Ye shall be holy, for I am holy." This is his conception of complete culture. Holiness, which he is careful to distinguish from asceticism, is the only complete culture, because it completely transforms the whole of man. The path leading to this goal is the way of life, for where there is no life the soul has no relation to anything at all. Again he recognises the importance of the past, but desires that we should not be slaves of the past. Since as living organisms there are aroused in us new wants, and we seek new values. These are some of the views which Dr. Berditchevsky holds. In his other works containing legend and novel, we find a multitude of great thoughts. Original beauty and holiness emanate from these. Heart and soul throbs in every word he writes. His creations possess an eternal literary value in spite ofthe fact that he stands on the highway wandering and seeking his path. I regret that lack of time forbids me to refer to a number of writers, but I must mention, if only by name, Dr. Klausner, a disciple of "Achad Ha'am," who has enriched our literature with many articles and books, among which are "Judaism and Humanity," and "Jesus," in which he explains Christ's attitude to Judaism, and that of the Jews to him; also Hilel Zeitlin, in some measure a disciple of Berditchevsky, in whom Jewish mysticism and Jewish idealism, and the Jewish soul yearning for God, find their greatest poet. It will be now my task to say a

few words on neo-Hebrew poetry in which Hebrew literature has reached an astonishing and admirable height. The greatest of modern poets from the national point of view is Byalik. Every line and every word throb with the life and soul of the Jewish nation. How true and how soul-stirring are these few verses in which he describes the national life. "In the womb God hath made me wretched and abject. He gave me a staff and told me to go. Go search for the rights denied thee in life; buy air to breathe, steal light to see. From door to door, with wallet in thy hand, go beg thy bread. And I am long weary with struggle and wandering. O my God, will there be an end: I do not live nor do I die." Beautiful and superb is the poem, "On the threshold of the House of Learning," to which he returns when his splendid dreams of the outside world have been shattered and destroyed. "Shall I lament the desolation in thee, or that in me; or shall I lament them both. I did not gather honey in my backslidings, and the evil spirit turned me from thee. I have lost all faith in the Lord, and my world is shattered. The waters have reached to my soul but it has escaped drowning. Thou didst not send me away empty handed from Thy peaceful shades. Thy benign angels accompanied me on my way. Alas, the enemy has conquered and despoiled me. But I rescued my God and my God rescued me." His poem, "The Talmudical Student," translated by Miss Helena Frank into English, describes the type of Rabbinical student for whom the study of the Law is the goal of life. The poem, "The Scroll of Fire," embracing the national and

Long Drawn Out Tragedy

since the destruction of Jerusalem is a poetic vision of wonderful intensity. His poem, "Songs of Fury," which he wrote after the massacre of Kishineff, is a veritable jewel of Hebrew poetry. Do we not seem to hear an echo of the great Hebrew prophets in the lines, "For the Lord called out Summer and Slaughter together. The sun shone; nature bloomed; the murderer killed." In this poem he calls heaven to account. In it is heard not merely notes of lamentation but the cry of protest of a gasping nation against itself and against the world. Although Byalik is principally a national poet whose poems are full of national and religious romanticism, still they are composed in a universal garb. He has written a few poems on nature, but these few merit a place in the literature of the world, and are paralleled only in the Scriptures. He has written a number of folk songs which are gems in form and construction. Saul Tchernechowsky, a poet of love and nature, of might and strength, belongs to the school of Berditchevsky. He is the creator of a new Hebrew poetry, and while Byalik sings of the Hebrew past and bewails the wretched present, Tchernechowsky sings of the new future. He is Hebrew and Greek together. His poem, "Towards Apollo," shows the Greek spirit within him. "I come to Thee, long-forgotten God. God of the past and bygone ages. I come to Thee, dost know me, I am the Jew, Thine ancient opponent. The faith of my fathers from that of Thy votaries was removed as heaven from earth. My nation aged and its God with it. The mutilated emotions of the prison-bound infirm have risen to life. God's light give me; give me God's light; life, oh life, every sinew calls and I came to Thee." Yes, the struggle in him between the Greek and the Jew is great; and bitter are his complaints against the teachers who bound the hands and feet of the nation. It is only the Golus, however, and the sordid in Judaism that he hates, while he loves the eternal that is in it. He believes in the future of his nation, which he prophesies will be brilliant and glorious. "When," as he says, "Nation will bless nation, my people will again bloom forth and in

the world there will be liberty; its prison chains will be removed and face to face will it behold light. It will live and love, do and dare, live on its own land, in this world, not in the future or in heaven; it has had too much of the life of the spirit." Tchernechowsky hears the voice of God in the whispering of the grass and the twittering of the birds, in the thundering of the heavens and the billows of the ocean, in the storms of Tamon and in the pulsing of the blood. "A beautiful tree, a beautiful field, in them I behold God's form. On every high mountain He basks in love. Where there is feeling of life, where there is flesh and blood, in plant and in stone is He personified. All things are His kindred, hind, toad, tree, and even lightning and thunder. He is not the God of the spirit but the God of the heart, this is His name and this is His memorial for ever." Tchernechowsky's love poems are full of the strength and joy of life. He describes nature with all the wealth of colour and hue, for he lives in the whole of creation. In his historical poem, "Benedict of Mayence," in which he describes a Jewish massacre of the Middle Ages, are to be found pen-pictures, perhaps unparalleled in the world's literature. The idylls in which he paints the ordinary life of the Jew constitute a wonderful Hebrew epic. He has also translated the poem "Hiawatha." This national poem, in which Longfellow reviews the lives of men and nations, and in which the sorrows of humanity and its suffering find an answering echo, loses nothing in his excellent translation, which in many places is superior to its translation in the Russian language. The biblical style which he employs and new terminology which he creates so become the subject matter that we forget we are reading a mere translation. Jacob Cohen is a poet who lives with nature and in it; his national poems are few, and while Tchernechowsky sings of the strong and mighty, Cohen sings of

The Frail and Elegant.

"I participate in all life about me, and all creation lives and blooms in me. Gently do my emotions flow, and all the scenes of life round about me, then do I feel a great living intimacy of soul. I embrace existence in all the abundance of its might." This is the central thought of all his poems. He disclaims all the hypocrisy of humanity, the distress and affliction of his people, and he flies to nature. There he walks with the stars and the flowers. He speaks to them and they answer him and receive him gladly. "When I go out to the forest or go out to the valley, how joyous is all and yearns for me. Trees and leaves tell me their secrets and an echo answers from the hidden glades." There he meets eternity and towards it he pours out his soul. "I sing of life and I sing my song at night. While men lie asleep and hear not my song. But the stars hear and they understand and so doth eternity." Jacob Cohen has a fine ear and a musical sense. The musicality of his words delights both the soul and the heart. The young poet Shnaier, Byalik calls the Samson of Hebrew poetry, whose seven locks grew within a night and who may also be compared to a torch of cedar wood burning with the fire of creativeness. For him, as for Berditchevsky, Judaism is not distinct from universalism. Judaism is a form of humanity and humanity is a certain portion of Judaism. He is the poet of the sublime, of the startling and invigorating. A European and a son of Asia, a descendant of warrior and prophet, his style is like the flinty rock. There is too much coarseness and sensuality in him, and in many of his poems he is similar to Charles Baudelaire in French poetry. But he expresses the coarsest passions in such a beautiful way that we forge the vulgarity. He

converts the base to the noble. There is no other poet who enters so deeply into the heart of a thing and who reveals the cant, false morality and conventional purity which underlie the polished veneer of civilisation. He has given us many poems, but he is a lyric rather than an epic writer. Every one of his poems, such as "In the Hills," "And there will be in Later Days," "A Vision of Desolation," and others, contain a world of thought. As for flights of imagination, he surpasses Tchernechowsky or Byalik. In one portion of his poem, "In the Hills," which he calls "Melody," general human problems are touched upon, in which by his poetical and philosophic flights he rises to a greater level than that attained by the author of "Faust." He wrote it when he was twenty-five. Even now he is not much above thirty. His great songs, "The Melodies of Israel," "The Middle Ages are Coming," "September," are full of beauty and poetic height, and there is no doubt that in him Hebrew poetry, unless some mischance occurs, will give to the world the poet of the twentieth century. When he was eighteen years of age he wrote a poem in which these verses are found :—"My daughter, thou dost ask

The Secret of Death.

Were it not better to ask the secret of life? Thou lookest with awe upon the dead, and I upon those who are born to live. Both life and death are evil sprites; both have agreed to play with us dwarfs. I will create and thou shalt cut off, and there will be a sport of living and dead. A fine sport indeed when we pigmies dance the dance of terror. To live is bad and bitter, but we do not wish to die. We know not which is better, and what the use of either." He, like Tchernechowsky, stood up against rules and laws, against the exaggerated spirituality of the Ghetto. In his song, "Myself alone," we see how he went out into the world to demand payment for the childhood of which he had been deprived. As a child of the East whose ancestors have given to the world gods, saviours, and prophets even to the savages, and which has scattered its wealth and life, leaving to its children only parchment and tattered remnants of its tabernacle and its flag, he stood up to take vengeance and to enjoy worldly life to a great degree. At first blinded by the world's brilliant flash he considered himself a free man and so he cries, "Arise, bless thy lot oh man who hath no land, or aim, or race. Who will be so free as thou if thou but renounce the burden of mysterious parchment." Seeing, however, that the beast in man still dominates as hitherto under the mask of hypocrisy, he found himself alone, and the Jew in him began to prevail. In "Melodies" wherein he pours out his heart to an Italian organ-grinder, a daughter of Rome, the city which destroyed his own country, he tells her of the victory his God has won; that there is not a holy book wherein is not heard the ripple of the Jordan, the rustle of the trees of Lebanon. There is nothing in the world wherein there is not the throbbing of the prophets and their dreams of light; of the beautiful harvest and grief of Ecclesiastes and the chant and fragrance of the Song of Songs. But the curse which the idols have uttered against Judaism their destroyer, has poisoned the holy feeling and brought the eternal hate against the victorious Jew. He demands his rights from the false nobility who have stolen his credentials, and he expresses the will of the nation that, "in the mountains of Besamim in Judah the fountains of life, frozen by the harsh cold of the North, will become once more the flowing fountains of Spring, and that the dream of a new Messiah, blurred hitherto by the mists, will become as clear as the sky and sink into the heart of the nation." I

conclude my lecture with Schnaier, who commenced as the Hebrew Charles Baudelaire, the decadent poet, and who, like the Jew that he is, rises from the base to the noble, from the lowest depth to the greatest height, and dreams of a new Messiah, though indeed there are a number of younger poets who cannot be treated here, although they show great power. I have not emphasised any central chord in my lecture, so that you can judge of Modern Hebrew Literature, as a whole, from your own individual standpoint. I think that what I have said contains the essence of the literature of the eternal Jew, of that wandering spectre plying his journey by day and night, and you will be able to see that this spectre is not so terrible as he is painted, and that he wants neither blood nor money as the modern mobs imagine, nor even death, as the authors of the legend, about the wandering Jew fancied. He wants only life, life of justice and a life of that holiness which arises from relation with life ; even the theme of death, so prevalent in the literature of the exile, contains within itself, if examined,

Deeper Faith in Life

and a desire for it. The spectre neither killed any gods, nor even men, as Shelley thought, for all the gods of the world are his. He killed, he slew only idols, and against Paganism whose whole object is murder and violence he will strive, whatever the consequence, so long as his soul lives within him. Maeterlinck, in his book, "The Treasure of the Humble," says : "Whole generations pass by in which intellect and beauty dominate the whole world when the soul itself is not perceived. So was it in the age of the Greek, so was it in the time of the Romans ; the soul escaped them ; so was it in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They lacked the inner light which affords the life of eternity in place of the life of the moment." I am afraid that at this very moment Europe, too, has lost her soul. You observe that Hebrew literature which began with the opposition between the intellect and the emotion, between beauty and goodness, is at present engaged in their reconciliation ; and the eternal Jew calls to you, and through you to the whole world, if in truth all the ideals which have been created, and all the fine phrases which have been uttered on the subject of humanity, are not empty expressions of no substance. See to it that when the thick clouds which now cover the horizon shall be dispersed, and when the light which brings life to all will again shine forth, see to it that this light be not made crimson with the blood of the Jew, as it has been hitherto. The wandering Jew does not want the bread of charity, nor the crumbs of benevolence. He is not content with mere equality of rights, but he wants his land where he and you combined will be able to restore to Europe that high and noble soul which it has lost, that soul in which Heaven and Earth are both reflected.

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